

Colorado River, Segment 2



ESSENTIAL FACTS

Length: 11.8 Miles

Corridor Acres: Approx. 5,482

Classification: Wild

Outstandingly Remarkable Values: Scenery, Recreation, Wildlife, Fish, Cultural, Geology/Hydrology, Ecological

LOCATION

Beginning at the River Mile 125 and ending at River Mile 112 (Westwater Canyon).

Moab Field Office

Canyon Country District

Grand County, Utah

2nd Congressional District



Utah State Office

Colorado River, Segment 2

General Description

This segment of the Colorado River contains Westwater Canyon, the BLM's most scenic, dramatic and untouched portion of the Colorado River within the entire Colorado Plateau. The whitewater trip through Westwater Canyon is a premier one or two day boating experience in a Wilderness Study Area. A Westwater Canyon float trip is often described as one of the "best one-day whitewater experiences" in the country. This trip is allocated both commercially and privately to 150 people per day. It is marketed both nationally and internationally. Demand exceeds supply for this outstanding boating experience.

The geology of Westwater Canyon is a result of the Colorado River cutting through and exposing the rocks of the Uncompahgre Uplift. The rock sequence runs from Precambrian (1.7 billion years old) to Cretaceous (150 million years old), with a 1.5 billion year nonconformity. Only in Westwater and the Grand Canyon are black Precambrian rocks exposed on the Colorado Plateau. These geological sequences create a gorge where radiant red sandstone walls contrast with the black Precambrian rocks. The Westwater Canyon section of the Colorado River also is home to four endangered fish, as well as to a variety of avian and terrestrial life. For example, Westwater Canyon includes one of the few bald eagle nest sites in Utah, and is home to desert bighorn sheep. Westwater Canyon represents a unique resource and a highly sought after experience.

Summary

This segment has regionally and nationally significant Outstandingly Remarkable Values (ORVs) and designation of this segment would provide a unique geological and recreation experience to the National System. Future congressional designation would protect free flow and ORVs and complement the intent of the Wilderness Study Area management strategies. The segment is withdrawn from mineral entry under the 1872 Mining Law by Secretarial Order. It is managed as a Wilderness Study Area under the *Interim Management Policy for Lands under Wilderness Review*. It is closed to leasing and all other surface disturbing activities under the 2008 Moab Resource Management Plan.

Grand County supports the designation of this segment, and sees the economic benefits provided by the rafting industry in the county. There are no anticipated negative effects from designation because there are no competing resource considerations. Finally, the segments downstream on the Moab BLM have been found suitable by the BLM and together these segments represent a significant contribution to the integrity of the Colorado River system.

It is interesting to note that Colorado River Segment 2 (Westwater Canyon) was a Study River specifically identified in PL 93-621 (an amendment to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act). It was found to be suitable as "Wild" in 1979 in an EIS completed by the National Park Service, in cooperation with the Utah Department of Natural Resources. Designation of Westwater Canyon as a "wild" river under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was passed by both houses of Congress in 1986. Although passed by both houses, the legislation was never sent to the President for signature as an unrelated rider was added to the Senate version at the end of the Congressional session. Consequently, there was no time for the bill to go to conference prior to the end of the Congress. Subsequently, both Utah Congressman Nielsen and Senator Garn, the sponsors of the legislation, retired and the act was not reintroduced.

Rivers Suitable for WSR Designation on Bureau of Land Management Lands in Utah

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